

Health Alert

October 5, 2001

**FROM: MAUREEN E. DEMPSEY, M.D.
DIRECTOR**

**SUBJECT: CDC Health Update: Addressing public health
message concerning Anthrax in Florida**

The Department of Health and Senior Services is forwarding the following information from CDC. Please contact the Department if you have any questions at 1-800-392-0272. More information on Anthrax is available at CDC's website: <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/Agent/Agentlist>. Also attached is a fact sheet on Anthrax.

October 4, 2001

Contact: CDC Press Office
(404) 639-3286

How to contact us:

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- The Florida State Department of Health and the CDC are investigating a case of anthrax in a 63-year-old male Florida resident. The diagnosis is confirmed by CDC's laboratory. So far this appears to be an isolated case.
- Anthrax is not contagious. The illness is not transmitted person to person.
- Sporadic cases of anthrax do occur in the United States, so a single case is not an indication of an outbreak. The last case of anthrax reported in the United States was earlier this year in Texas.
- The rapid identification of this single case is the result of the heightened level of disease monitoring being done by the public health and medical community. This is the disease monitoring system in action.
- Right now, there is no suggestion of other possible cases, but we are aggressively checking to see if other people are similarly ill.
- The Florida State Health Department and a team from CDC are aggressively investigating the source of infection. They are reconstructing the patient's schedule for the last few weeks to attempt to determine the location where the patient may have been exposed.
- A team of CDC epidemiologists were sent to Florida to look for any indications of exposure to this disease. Medical teams and supplies are prepared to be moved quickly if needed.
- CDC and state health officials are alerting health care providers to look for unusual cases of respiratory disease. Although anthrax starts out with flu-like symptoms, it rapidly progresses to severe illnesses, including pneumonia and meningitis.

- If anyone has been exposed, antibiotics are the appropriate preventive treatment. CDC has an emergency supply of antibiotics readily available for distribution. If the investigation of the cause of this illness indicated that you need antibiotics, your state and local health department will notify you and your physician and will assure you receive the drugs.
- Based on what we know right now, there is no need for people to take any extraordinary actions or steps. They should not go to a doctor or hospital unless they are sick. They should not buy and hoard medicines or antibiotics. They should not buy gas masks.

The public needs to understand that our public health system is on a heightened sense of alert for any diseases that may come from a biological attack. So we may have more reports of what may appear to be isolated cases. We're going to respond more aggressively to these cases than in the past.